

DUNHUANG IMPRESSION: A MUSIC COMPOSITION FOR ZHUDI FROM DUNHUANG CULTURE IN CHINA

Lei Wen¹ Akkarapon Dejwacharanon²

Abstract

The bamboo flute, as an important part of Chinese music, embodies profound cultural connotations. The research and development of Dunhuang's musical art are of great significance for promoting Chinese music onto the international stage.

This study takes Dunhuang music as its inspiration and adopts "Dunhuang on the Silk Road" as its theme. It combines the bamboo flute, clarinet, and piano, integrates contemporary compositional techniques with freehand narrative structures, and incorporates Dunhuang culture into the creation of musical performances. Through the dialogue and integration of Chinese and Western instruments, it showcases the inclusive vitality of Dunhuang culture, allowing traditional music to shine brightly in modern creations and providing practical cases for cross-cultural communication.

Keywords: bamboo flute, folk music, Dunhuang Music, music composition, Silk Road Culture

¹ Student, Master of Music and Performing Arts, Faculty of Music and Performing Arts, Burapha University, 907431515@qq.com

² Assistant Professor, DFA of Fine Arts from the Faculty of Music and Performing Arts, Burapha University, akkarapon@buu.ac.th

Receive 05/05/68, Revise 25/07/68, Accept 30/07/68

1. introduce

Dunhuang, located in the northwest of Gansu Province, is a world-famous historical and cultural city. This ancient city, with its time-honored and rich culture, has witnessed the historical changes of the Silk Road. Dunhuang not only boasts distinctive geographical landscape features but also embodies profound humanistic art. Due to its unique geographical location, Dunhuang has become a historical and cultural symbol on the ancient Silk Road. Since ancient times, the Dunhuang area has thrived in commercial trade. Relying on the advantages of the Silk Road, it has also promoted in-depth cultural exchanges through integration. Dunhuang has a time-honored history and culture, containing profound and rich cultural elements—including the mysterious religious art culture and the unique musical culture that integrates influences from various countries along the Silk Road.

The uniqueness of musical art in the Dunhuang region stems from its musical style, which was formed by the integration of musical elements from the Western Regions, Arab regions, and Central Asia, with Chinese music as the core. This distinctive musical style features unique techniques and characteristics, both in the structural composition of works and in the use of various musical instruments. Through the appreciation and analysis of numerous Dunhuang musical and artistic works, we find that most of them not only adopt Chinese musical composition techniques but also incorporate the unique rhythms of Arabic tones and Western Regions music—endowing the music with rich expressiveness in melody. In terms of instrumental use in these works, Chinese instruments are combined with those from the Western Regions, Arab regions, and other areas. This fully reflects the inclusiveness and diversity of Dunhuang musical art.

1.1 Definition of Specific Terms: Zhudi (bamboo flute)

“Zhudi” (bamboo flute) is a traditional Chinese wind instrument, mainly made of bamboo. It produces sound through the vibration of the air column inside the tube, which is caused by airflow through the blowing hole. With a clear and round tone, it occupies an important position in Chinese national music culture and is one of the core instruments in traditional instrumental performances.

“Zhudi” is translated as “Bamboo Flute” because it belongs to the same flute category as the Western “flute”. Both produce sound through air column vibration and share similar playing styles. The character “Zhu” (bamboo) clearly indicates its material—bamboo—distinguishing it from Western flutes, which are made of metal. This translation not only reflects the connection in instrument attributes but also highlights its uniqueness in material and culture.

2. Research objectives

- 2.1 To study Dunhuang music culture
- 2.2 To create Dunhuang Impression

3. research methodology

This study employed a combination of qualitative and innovative research methods. During the research process, a vast amount of relevant literature was consulted extensively, and information related to Dunhuang music—including its history, art, and bamboo flute techniques—was collected through literature searches and interviews. Through group interviews, the research explored musical styles, performance techniques, and creative forms, excavated their cultural connotations, and transformed these elements into contemporary music creation.4. Dunhuang's art of music.

The music art in the Dunhuang area profoundly confirms the integration and co-prosperity of different artistic categories. As a clever carrier of the convergence of diverse arts, the painted statues in the Dunhuang caves subtly integrate cultural elements such as music, dance and opera, and build a unique cross-media art architecture. Such multi-dimensional artistic infiltration not only extends the expression dimension of sound art, but also gives birth to the unique theoretical model of Oriental Rui Si. When we carefully interpret the solidified music and dance scenes in the murals, we can not only touch the essence of the ancient music theory, but also see its innovative transformation in the practice of different arts.

Dunhuang mural music is a major part of Dunhuang grotto mural culture, revealing the musical and cultural phenomena between ancient China and other countries and regions. There are a large number of music and dance scenes in the

murals of Dunhuang Grottoes, which we call Dunhuang music and dance art. It is a treasure trove for studying the history of music, songs and dances. Music was originally an auditory art, but Dunhuang music presents itself in paintings with exquisite musical skills, and vividly expresses the schools and aesthetics of Dunhuang mural music in the form of murals with its unique charm. If there were no depiction of musical images, the overall appeal of Dunhuang murals would be much inferior. (Zong. Y, 2019).

4. The main style and characteristics of Dunhuang music

The main styles and characteristics of music in the Dunhuang region stem from several key formative factors. The first primary factor is the geographical location of Dunhuang. As a hub on the ancient Silk Road, it witnessed a thriving flow of merchants and travelers, which led to frequent exchanges between various civilizations. This is also the source of important musical characteristics in Dunhuang's musical art—for example, musical elements from the Western Regions, Central Asia, and Arabia were introduced through these exchanges. However, the geographical influence on Dunhuang's musical art goes beyond this: the unique landforms of Dunhuang, including mountains, rivers, deserts, and oases, have also added extensive and rich musical elements to the creation of Dunhuang's musical art.

The second important formative factor stems from the prosperity of Buddhism in the Dunhuang region. The prosperity of religious music is evident from the construction of the famous Dunhuang Mogao Grottoes, which also provided rich cultural elements for the development of diversity in Dunhuang's musical art. Throughout a long history, faith and music have maintained a very close connection. In the spread and development of Buddhist music, religious music has played a crucial role.

The integration of multicultural art in Dunhuang area endows the richness of Dunhuang music art, which makes the structure of musical art become unique and the music connotation more profound. The exchange and exchange of multi-ethnic cultures in Dunhuang is not only the collision of musical styles, but also the integration of different countries and civilizations. Dunhuang area music and art shows to the world the essence of the integration of multicultural elements through various forms of

melodies, rhythms and unique performance styles. In this artistic wave of cultural integration, many musical works have produced new ideas and connotations, which allows us to feel and inherit this precious historical and cultural wealth more deeply.

5. Bamboo flute music in Dunhuang art

As an important part of music in the Dunhuang region, the Chinese national instrument bamboo flute has a long history. With its bright, sweet, and melodiously profound timbre, the bamboo flute fully and vividly showcases the rhythms and styles of Dunhuang music. It occupies a significant position in the musical culture of the Dunhuang region and has been continuously inherited and developed within Dunhuang's musical art. Traditional Chinese bamboo flute music typically uses pentatonic scales. During its inheritance and development in the Dunhuang region, it has gradually integrated heptatonic musical styles from regions such as the Western Regions, Central Asia, India, and Arabia. This integration and development—both in playing techniques and styles—have greatly enriched the traditional bamboo flute music art.

The bamboo flute is a musical instrument with a long history. From ancient times to the present, there is a wealth of content related to bamboo flute performance. At this stage, bamboo flute performance is mainly divided into two styles: southern style and northern style. The southern style mainly highlights the style characteristics of "trembling, overlapping, giving, shaking, and hitting", while the northern style pays more attention to "chopping, spitting, flower, and sliding". The two major factions have their own styles, presenting a situation of "two tigers facing each other". (Wang, D., 2021)

Through the study of the artistic form and cultural symbolism of bamboo flutes in Dunhuang murals, it can be seen that bamboo flutes are not only a musical instrument, but also a profound symbol of social culture and religious beliefs in the Tang Dynasty. The shape design and decorative details of bamboo flutes in murals not only reflect its elegance and purity as a cultural symbol, but also reflect the Tang Dynasty's high pursuit of natural aesthetics and musical art. (Zhang, T. J., 2024)

6. Creation of Dunhuang

The creative technique characteristics of the work are mainly reflected in the timbre of the instrument, the ideas and musical forms. The composer uses the excavation and arrangement of the timbre of the instrument, the collage and absorption of world music elements, the application of Chinese traditional music thinking, and the morphological characteristics of music. In addition, the work also uses common composition techniques such as imitation and variation. These creative techniques have woven for us the Silk Road with multiple instruments, multiple modes, and the characteristics of oriental world music language. The composer uses her creative style in the national orchestra to integrate and explore the inheritance and development of Chinese traditional music culture and world music culture, providing a useful reference for the creation of modern atmosphere of contemporary works of national orchestral music. (Su, Q. H., & Gu, T., 2020)

Modern art works with the theme of "Dunhuang" are no longer limited to art forms such as murals and sculptures, but have inspired contemporary music composers to create new art through the inspiration of "Dunhuang" art and culture. Under the composer's pen, through the form of music, not only has the static Dunhuang mural art taken to the stage from the grottoes, but it has also become a dynamic music art, fully expressing the charm of ethnic music and achieving the enhancement of artistic value. (Xiao, F., 2023)



Figure 1 Live performance of the original Chinese ethnic music work

'Impressions of Dunhuang'

Original Chinese Ethnic Music Work "Impressions of Dunhuang" (March 15, 2024)

<https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1793564674416448263&wfr=spider&for=pc>

“Dunhuang Impression” is a musical work created around Dunhuang, a historical and cultural city on China’s Silk Road. The work is approximately 12 minutes long. Through the collaboration of the bamboo flute, clarinet, and piano, the melodies of these three instruments outline the magnificent historical and cultural landscape of the ancient city of Dunhuang, using musical notes to depict the thousand-year-old murals of the Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang. In its creation, the work integrates the characteristics of Chinese national music into the melody, creating a beautiful and atmospheric melody full of classical charm. It richly and exquisitely showcases the grandeur of Dunhuang’s musical and artistic culture in China. A famous scholar of the Eastern Han Dynasty explained in his annotations to The Book of Han that “Dun (敦) means ‘great’; Huang (煌) means ‘flourishing’”—interpreted as “steadfast and grand, bright and brilliant”. These classic annotations make people deeply connect with the history, art, and culture of the Dunhuang region. The name “Dunhuang” thus leaves a profound, complex, and regretful impression. This meaningful connotation has profoundly endowed the original Chinese national music work Dunhuang Impression with its subjective musical concepts and core ideas. Since ancient times, the Chinese people have had unlimited imagination about the ancient Silk Road, and they have been filled with yearning and admiration, especially for Dunhuang, which lies on the Silk Road.



Figure 2 (50th Anniversary of the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between China and Thailand "China Thailand Friendship" 2025 New Year Concert "Impressions of Dunhuang" Performance)

Impression of Dunhuang contains a vast concept of time and space in its creative concept. Its temporal structure works as follows: looking back at ancient times from a modern timeline, and gradually returning to the present from an immersion in ancient Dunhuang. This timeline structure also determines that the work is divided into three chapters, unfolding through musical narrative and expression along the timeline. Such musical dialogue has not only greatly enriched the expressiveness of modern Dunhuang music but also opened up a new path for the inheritance and innovation of traditional music.

In the creation of the original Chinese national music work Dunhuang Impression, considerations were given to both instrument arrangement and melodic structure. Specifically, the uniqueness of different instruments' timbres and the harmony of their ensemble were taken into account. The bamboo flute, clarinet, and piano have excellent compatibility in terms of timbre breadth and range. Through reasonable composition and arrangement, these three instruments can greatly enrich the musical layers and emotions of the work. Such varying interweaving of musical melodies not only allows the work to inherit the style and essence of Dunhuang's musical art but also, on this basis, achieves reasonable innovation by integrating Western instruments. Through the combination of these three instruments, Dunhuang's musical art can attain greater diversity and expressiveness, enhance its cultural inclusiveness and artistic value, and thus enable it to align with the expressive needs of the current era and achieve innovative development in modern times.

The whole original music work of Dunhuang Impression is divided into three parts. Each chapter of the work tells different musical connotations and musical stories from different perspectives and timeslines. The first part is "the silk road rhyme" as the theme, piano, bamboo flute, clarinet in order alone played their chapters, when the distant deep music melody sounded, the vicissitudes of life notes as if from the depths of history, whispered telling the story of the past, as if lead the audience through time and space, feel the style of dunhuang music culture in one thousand, make the listener as if in the prosperity of the ancient silk road, to experience the silk road unique brilliant and grand, explore the extensive and profound Chinese national music culture.

"Dunhuang impression" central "silk road symphony chapter" as the theme, the western music style and rhythm in bamboo flute and clarinet allegro rhythm of the peak, presents the silk road on the unique lasting appeal of dunhuang music art and style, music flexibly in the melodious and slow movement and full of exotic customs allegro switch between, fully show the prosperous cheng jing on the ancient silk road and music scene. From the music architecture of the time line with melody to show the ancient silk road on the people's life and trade lively scene, three instruments in the melody very enjoy mutual echo, mutual cooperation, common paint a picture of majestic vivid music, as if let a person see the silk road caravan endless stream, bustling prosperity.

"Dunhuang impression" at the end of the music content is "prosperous chapter" as the music theme, bamboo flute music slowly in the quiet and distant, and the second paragraph of the clarinet music to promote each other and the change of the music color, in this part of the music chapter, bamboo flute and clarinet from the quiet music color slowly to the end of the melody, the ancient carefree and strong musical melody rhythm, the ancient silk road belongs to dunhuang time elegance show incisively and vividly, with music to lead the audience indulge in dunhuang that brilliant history and culture.

7. Conclusion

Dunhuang area music art unique style and diversification of the rhythm of modern Chinese national music creation provides great inspiration, "dunhuang impression" at the time of creation from the dunhuang music art draw sufficient nutrients and essence, the ancient long melody and rhythm into the contemporary music creation, create conforms to the characteristics of the era of dunhuang music works, make dunhuang music art in modern new vitality and style. "Impression of dunhuang" aims to show the Chinese dunhuang music art culture, let everybody various and deep understanding of the silk road culture blend and dunhuang music art, to present the charm of Chinese national music culture and profound culture, for the Chinese national music persist glorious chapter.

8. Discussion

In the process of researching and exploring how to innovate and integrate Dunhuang traditional music, there are many aspects that need to be noted, especially in the use of modern composition techniques and aesthetic concepts for creation and development based on traditional music materials. It is important to grasp the compatibility between traditional music materials and modern music styles, innovate on the basis of tradition, and bring new vitality to traditional music.

9. Suggestion

Dunhuang music has a long history, and in research, it is necessary to have a deep understanding of Dunhuang's historical culture and traditional customs. In the creation and performance of music, it is necessary to master the unique artistic style and characteristics of Dunhuang region, learn and study various music styles and creative techniques, add layers and musical depth to the works, and contribute to the innovative development of Dunhuang music.

References

Su, Q. H., & Gu, T. (2020). *Fusion of cosmopolitanism and nationalism: Musical analysis of Jiang Ying's Silk Road*. Sound of the Yellow River(9), 9.

Wang, D. (2021). *Performance techniques and emotional expression of the bamboo flute piece Dunhuang Feelings*. Art Panorama(12), 18–20.

Xiao, F. (2023). *Study on Dunhuang music culture*. Mingri Fengshang(14), 1–3.

Zhang, T. J. (2024). *The artistic form and cultural symbolic significance of wind instruments in Dunhuang murals*. Art Panorama(7), 73–75.

Zong, Y. (2019). *Research on the value of Dunhuang music*. Daguan(3), 102–103.